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FM AMEMBASSY ANTANANARIVO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2051
INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0118
RHMFIS/CDR USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANTANANARIVO 000089

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/E - MBEYZEROV
PARIS FOR RKANEDA
LONDON FOR PLORD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/04/2018

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SUBJECT: MADAGASCAR: TOWARD A NATIONAL CONSULTATIVE CONFERENCE?

REF: A. 09 ANTANANARIVO 80
[1B.](#) 09 ANTANANARIVO 85

Classified By: AMBASSADOR NIELS MARQUARDT FOR REASONS 1.4 B AND D.

[¶](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Saturday's bloodbath makes it both more urgent and more necessary to find a viable third path to resolve the Malagasy political crisis: one that neither perpetuates the discredited Ravalomanana in office, nor cedes power to the naive, extra-constitutional, and irresponsible mob that provoked -- quite possibly intentionally -- the carnage. The Malagasy themselves are shocked beyond disbelief by what has happened and are now turning even more plaintively to the international community for possible solutions. UN Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs Haile Menkerios meets both Ravalomanana and Rajoelina today, as part of his fact-finding mission on behalf of the UNSYG. He confidentially told diplomats Sunday that he hopes to find an opening toward a National Consultative Conference (NCC), a solution I and others encouraged him to pursue. Such an approach, if accepted, would dilute the influence of the two main protagonists and broaden the dialogue to others (especially cotier elements) in search of a solution that would truly reflect the nation's interest.

[¶](#)2. (C) That said, the Malagasy government at this point insists that Menkerios was invited here only to assess, not to mediate, and he is almost certainly not ready to accept this proposal -- yet. Menkerios is in close contact -- and in synch -- with Jean Ping of the AU, who is sending Amara Essy here today or tomorrow as the AU's own envoy, but not (as of Sunday) yet in touch with SADC, whose ExecSec departed quietly over the weekend; the trick will be to sideline SADC (probably Ping's job, not Menkerios') and to keep the UN/AU in the lead, as that duo will have more clout with the Malagasy (and will also be more amenable to our input). There is already key non-aligned Malagasy support building for this NCC idea as a possible way forward. The Defense and Justice Ministers resigned this morning and other ministerial resignations may follow, possibly helping Ravalomanana understand the new reality, which by all accounts he continues to deny. An alternative -- which would probably qualify after Saturday as "too little too late," would involve a newly contrite Ravalomanana apologizing publicly (for a host of shortcomings), dismissing his government (before more resign), promising a "national unity government" in its place led by a respected cotier prime minister (who though?), cancelling the AU Summit, and/or making other concessions that show him to have understood recent events; this scenario, given Ravalomanana's personality, is not likely. (His outright resignation is even less likely.)

[¶](#)3. (C) I believe that it would be premature for the US to

engage directly with the Malagasy parties at this time. Close communication, especially with the UN and AU (and also with the French), will be important to remaining in synch with other key players. Once the NCC idea, or some similar process, appears to be gaining momentum here, a call from the Secretary or another senior USG official might be effective in convincing the President and perhaps other key players here to move forward on this basis. A press statement from the Department is needed today; a draft text has been sent to AF/E. END SUMMARY.

VIOLENCE QUELLED, WAR OF WORDS CONTINUES

¶4. (C) Saturday's bloodbath is a game-changer here. Rajoelina and his newly-named "Prime Minister" showed themselves more irresponsible than ever -- and unworthy of future national leadership -- by provoking the carnage in a way many think was intentional. The Presidential guard -- under the direct command of the President, not part of the normal chain of command through the Defense Minister and CHOD -- fired on his own people, including, in many observers' opinion, by using snipers to shoot people down in cold blood.

A widening perception is that the Guard includes foreign soldiers. The notion (whether true or not) of a Malagasy President hiring foreigners to kill Malagasy is repugnant here, and will take on greater momentum in coming days, I suspect. Today's resignation of the hapless Defense Minister, all but invisible here throughout the crisis, will add to these perceptions, perhaps embolden the opposition further, and may be followed by other resignations.

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¶5. (C) Nonetheless, a tense calm prevailed Sunday and again this morning as both government and opposition leaders sought to stake out their positions and cast blame for the February 7 blood-bath at Ambohitsorohitra Palace in central Antananarivo. The most current information available indicates that roughly 25 people were killed and 200 wounded in the violent confrontation between protesters and security forces that resulted after a political rally turned into a march to a known "red zone" (where protests had been explicitly forbidden, and troops given authority in advance to stand their ground with lethal force if necessary). While opposition followers generally limited their activities Sunday to mourning the dead with a ceremony at Mahamasina, leaders on both sides made clear that Saturday's events, rather than serving as a wake-up call, had only hardened their resolve.

¶6. (C) Former Mayor Rajoelina's supporters aired their anger on pro-opposition radio stations VIVA and Antsiva, calling for revenge against the GOM. In his own public statement mid-afternoon Sunday, Rajoelina himself vowed to "fight to the end", perhaps as a counterweight to a tearful address Saturday night that made him look naive and out of control. President Ravalomanana and Prime Minister Rabamananjara declared their intention to arrest those responsible for the protest march, and gave no indication that they saw any blood on their hands. The Security Minister announced an arrest warrant for Rajoelina on Saturday, which is likely to give the opposition a new head of steam. Their promise to restore order is not likely to mesh well with Rajoelina's call for a ceremony of national mourning tomorrow at 10am in Ambohijatovo Park (aka Place de la Democratie).

AN AU/UN SOLUTION?

¶7. (C) Caught between these two warring leaders and their groups of hard-core supporters, however, is the majority of the Malagasy population - who barely know them, have no interest in their feud, and do not frame the difficulties of their daily life in terms of democratic governance, media freedom, or human rights -- but do believe that Rajoelina has

successfully articulated many of their grievances about rising food costs, deteriorating standards of living, and rising hopelessness in general. In this context, the international community has widened its vision of a solution to include the multitude of political groups necessary to represent a broader spectrum of Malagasy political opinion. With 18 ethnic groups spread around 22 regions, and a host of grievances that extend far beyond those making headlines in the capital city, an accord between Rajoelina and Ravalomanana was never likely to put an end to the broader conflict that has persisted in some form ever since Ravalomanana took office in 2002, and for which the people now see him as increasingly unlikely to address.

¶ 8. (C) In the coming days, UN A/SYG Haile Menkerios will examine the possibility of what he is calling a "national consultative conference", bringing in not only representatives of the two Tana political leaders, but also coastal opposition groups and others. He is initially here on a purely fact-finding mission, but is hopeful that his mandate may be broadened. While he accepts that consensus will be difficult (if not impossible), he hopes to capitalize on a growing perception that this conflict can only worsen without mediation. With both GOM and opposition leaders privately expressing frustration with the resident international community for not explicitly taking their side, Menkerios will enjoy a degree of neutrality that may hard to achieve by other means. Menkerios is in close touch, and in synch, with Jean Ping at the AU, and will work closely with Ping's newly-named envoy Amara Essy, who arrives here today or tomorrow. Menkerios probably will rely on Ping to neutralize any competing initiative from SADC, which would not enjoy the same clout or credibility here. Indeed, persistent rumors of South African mercenaries have likely done SADC and South Africa no favors with opposition leaders.

¶ 9. (C) This effort will be bolstered by growing calls from non-aligned Malagasy public figures such as Benjamin Andriamparany Radavidson (former Minister of Finance, then Education, before his humiliating dismissal from government in 2008), Manandafy Rakotonirina (President of political party MFM, nominally in opposition but capable of working with Ravalomanana and his party, TIM), and others who have

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publicly proposed similar solutions, and enjoy a certain stature as experienced statesmen and veterans of prior crises. National Assembly President (and former PM -- and perhaps a future one) Jacques Sylla may also be key, if only he can overcome a persistent case of fence-sitting and take a clear stand. While the details of their proposals vary, the basic elements are the same: an inclusive national conference, a government of "transition" or "reconciliation", and a focus on democratic principles, economic renewal, and restoration of public security. Radavidson's proposal has the beauty of providing a formula for doing all this within the existing constitution; it would have Ravalomanana remain head of state (perhaps no longer possible), while ceding enormous powers to his Prime Minister.

DEPARTMENT SUPPORT CAN PLAY A KEY ROLE -- BUT NOT YET

¶ 10. (C) Post believes this effort to be best route forward at this time, and requests Department be prepared to support the NCC proposal once the time is ripe. Ravalomanana may resist the conference, as he has resisted dialogue in the past; a well-timed phone call from the Secretary or another senior department official, followed by a reinforcing press statement, could tip the balance. Post will work with our international partners in country to identify, with as much lead time as possible, the key moment(s) when high-profile intervention would best support this initiative. Meanwhile, we ask for another Press Statement in the wake of Saturday's carnage; a draft text has been provided to AF/E by email.

MARQUARDT